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ABSTRACT

The origins of the Oklahoma Delaware reflect a complex history of migration, forced relocation, and punitive concentration. Though 36 tribal identities survive today, they are not of equal cultural coherence. Among the Delaware, there is no simple relation between socioeconomic status, level of acculturation, and factional membership. Rather, the emergence of complementary roles played out in mutually satisfying transactions between elders and organizers, ritual specialists, and persons in need of ritual services constitute the politically significant rallying point for factional alliance wherein retribalization takes place. Virtually all Delaware are of mixed ancestry, and legal "Indianness" does not by itself constitute ethnic identity, since it is defined only by pedigree and not by behavior. Legal Indians become social Indians in Oklahoma if they participate in certain public social situations labeled "Indian doings" and orient themselves to a set of standards known as the "Indian way". Since language, the most powerful symbol of Indian identity, is the least used symbol in Oklahoma, the Delaware abide by a set of "moral ground rules" that cross tribal frontiers and define Indian behavior. Conscious, elaborated expression of identity is manifest in public events or "crisis observances" where "badges" of identity are displayed. Badges of identity are also operative in private expression of identity.

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ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY IN NORTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

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In this paper I present in preliminary form a model of "Indian" and "tribal" identities which locates persons calling themselves "Delaware" in the complex, polyethnic and non-reservation social setting of northeastern Oklahoma.¹ My concern is with a folk taxonomy used in this diverse setting, which distinguishes Indians from Non-Indians and orders the former into tribal categories. I ask how cultural forms are put to strategic use in the presentation of identities on both levels of the folk taxonomy.

Leach recognized twenty years ago that "maintenance and insistence upon cultural difference can itself become a ritual action expressive of social relations" (Leach, 1934: 17). In the recent work of Frederick Barth, a general theory of ethnicity premised on this recognition has been adumbrated. Culture is socially relevant to boundary relations in so far as it: a) offers potentially contrastive diacritica, or visible markers of identity, and b) defines potentially contrastive standards for the evaluation of behavior (Barth, 1969). Convergent histories account for much of these cultural differences. Indianists ought to ask to what extent the differential survival and revival of tribal customs is a function of their relative efficacy for signalling boundaries.

Distinctions can also be created and elaborated out of inter-ethnic encounters in response to perceptions of "empty slots" in an emerging matrix of diacritical features. And what Bateson (1933) called schismogenesis works here, too, so that some of what Indian believe they are, is, quite simply what whites are not. Whatever their provenience, I think the markers which people use can be subjected to structural analysis for their contrastive properties and transformation rules in much the same fashion as we analyze "totemic" classifications. I shall argue that the tribal order given by the folk taxonomy is a mechanical one, distinguished by structural analogues, and informed by a common, "Indian" morality.

Barth himself has been more interested in the organization of roles across ethnic boundaries than in their symbolic representations. He attaches particular weight to role complementarities, to "organic" interdependence in exchange relations broadly conceived and so operating in political and ritual, as well as in ecological-economic contexts. It is this part of Barth's model that I find least appropriate to contemporary Oklahoma. Following a comparative framework suggested by Van den Berghe (1973) I shall argue that conditions of limited pluralism obtain in northeastern Oklahoma, restricting ethnically relevant interaction to a few social situations while ethnically irrelevant interaction characterizes many more encounters.

Some 98,000 Oklahomans identified themselves as "Indians" in the 1970 census (US Bureau of the Census, 1973: PC (2) 1F; PC (1): 38). There are now more self-labelled Indians in the state than in any other. Their origins are very diverse, reflecting a complex history of migration, forced relocation and punitive concentration which brought remnants of perhaps 64 once distinct peoples (Wright 1952), from Florida to California, into juxtaposition. Thirty-six "tribal" identities, not all with equal Federal recognition or with anything like equal cultural coherence, survive today. Delaware settled from Kansas in the Cooweescowee District of the old Cherokee Nation, on the cultural frontiers of Woodlands and Prairie.² Their neighbors to the west were Osage, ^{Cherokee and} to the east and south, Shawnee, and their most important relations have been with these groups. Indians are wont to describe their world as if it were still laid out into tribal territories: "Delaware Country," "Sac and Fox Country." But apart from scattered individual holdings still under allotment restrictions and a few small tracts reserved or bequeathed for tribal functions there are no distinctly "Indian" lands in the northeastern counties. Most Indians espousing particular tribal affiliations do not concentrate in

demographic communities; they intergrate markedly with Whites (who everywhere outnumber them) and with each other.³ And inter-marriage has been significant: my genealogies show more White-Delaware than Delaware-Delaware marriages in this century, and almost as many out-marriages to Shawnees.

Field data and extrapolations from the last census indicate that self-labelled Indians distribute widely across the socio-economic class structure of northeastern Oklahoma. In part this is traceable to the peculiarly open and fluid society which emerged here under the stimulus of the land openings and oil and mining booms. That social order survived the Depression in my area, by contrast with the Hill Cherokee country where community isolation and social distance are said to have increased since the twenties. (Wahrhaftig, 1968).

Unlike some findings elsewhere, (e.g., Spindler 1955), I see no simple relation between socio-economic status, level of acculturation, and factional membership ^{Among Delawares} and their neighbors. Very marked differences in linguistic and cultural attrition, the latter defined by reference to post-Removal baselines, certainly exist, both between and within tribes. It is politically significant ~~among~~ Delawares, but less as a rallying point for factional alliance than in the emergence of complementary roles played out in mutually satisfying transactions between elders, and organizers, ritual specialists (who compete with each other), and persons in need of ritual services. And, it is balanced by retribalization or re-identification with "Delawareness" which proceeds in part through such transactions. Because this paper is concerned less with the internal dynamics of contemporary Delaware society than with the common denominators of being Delaware and being Indian, I turn now to the assertion of these categorical identities.

Delaware map their social world into three racial categories: Indian, White and Black, with options of using formal, informal, and pejorative terms for

Whites and Blacks in both Delaware and Indian English. Indians are further subdivided. "Our relations" or "people like us" are for the most part, Woodlands peoples actually or potentially classifiable by the consanguinity of tribes (Speck 1937): Shawnee are grandchildren, Cherokee brothers, and so brought into relations of deference and alliance which are putatively moral and were once historically significant.

The "wild tribes" are the High Plains peoples settled in western Oklahoma: Kiowa, Comanche, Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho. Delaware lack a cover term for their Prairie neighbors, the Southern Siouans and the Pawnee, and disagree as to whether any or all of them are "wild tribes." This proceeds, I think, from the close historical relations of Delaware and Osage, together with a reluctant recognition that Osage are culturally much more like Poncas than they are like Delaware. Specific ethnonyms, in Delaware and in English, label tribes.

Virtually all Delaware are in fact of mixed ancestry. "Indian," and "tribal," identity is asserted, contested or denied by the manipulation of genealogies as pedigrees. There is a strict legal sense in which "Indian" identity is dependent on tribal identity, and it is only in this sense that we can speak of what Van den Berghe (1973) calls structural pluralism, segmentation of society into corporate groups, in Oklahoma. By this definition "Indians" do not constitute a structural segment so much as a congeries of like-structured segments, and these last are, in politico-legal terms, tribes. To be legally Indian is to be a residual heir in one or more corporations of interest which devolve from the land cessions of formerly sovereign polities. Corporation memberships entitle persons to varying kinds of governmental services or compensations, depending on the operation of partially overlapping definitions which restrict eligibilities for particular rights. Because inter-marriage has been so frequent, many Indians have multiple corporation memberships.

Legal Indianness does not by itself constitute ethnic identity since it is defined only by pedigree and not by behavior. While I am not yet able to specify the precise proportions, it is quite clear that a considerable majority of legal Delaware qualifying for payments under the terms of a pending land claims settlement either primarily identify socially and culturally as members of another tribe, or do not now operate as "Indians" at all. To understand this we must look more closely at the cultural and social dimensions of Indian ethnicity. Being socially and culturally Indian means turning tribal membership from legal fiction into meaningful social categories. Tribes in this sense are, like their legal counterparts, constructed out of the edited genealogies of their members. But they now enter into behavioral choices. They are publically symbolized by adherence to particular rules, observances and badges which have been put together from traditional repertoires and latter-day analogic invention. And they depend upon some mutual recognition expressed in public forums.

Legal Indians become social Indians if they choose to participate in certain public social situations which are labelled "Indian doings," and while in these situations agree to orient their behavior at least minimally to a set of standards called "Indian way" which governs these situations. Whites are also recruited into Indian doings, primarily as spouses of Indians, much less frequently as hobbyists or anthropologists, but their right to participate is always potentially contestable. There is in fact, complex interplay between content and participation in the definition of these events; their "Indian" legitimacy, as well as that of individuals, may be challenged. This is likely to happen if too many Whites or marginal Indians appear in high-visibility performance roles or are overly influential in back-stage organization. White hobbyist pow-wows, however scrupulously faithful to the moral and technical norms of Indian models, are not considered "Indian doings." I have found,

interestingly, rather more acceptance of, e.g., all-Indian softball or golf tournaments as Indian doings, but these and similar events are likely to be diacritically embellished with "Indian" motifs such as prayer.

The primary classes of public Indian doings, however, are Indian in content. They include in my area pow-wows, (secular war dances), stomp dances, surviving Prairie and Woodlands ceremonials, gourd dances, peyote meetings, "Indian dinners," crafts shows, hand games and "Indian football" games. As should be apparent, these events are extraordinarily diverse in their provenience and histories, reflecting the cultural mosaic of Oklahoma Indian experience. What is remarkable about them is the extent to which they are all effectively intertribal in their support networks, actively recruiting attenders and key participants from across tribal boundaries, and this is nearly as true for ceremonial events as for secular dances. In some cases this reflects cultural or population attrition past the minimum threshold of local mobilization. The Ponca have become specialists in war dance singing, servicing the Osage Inloska and most secular pow-wows in my area with head singers and supporters. More generally, and more in accord with what Indians like to think happen at doings, inter-tribal relations are cast into symmetric terms of ceremonial cooperation, "Helping each other out." And perhaps most importantly I see this state of affairs as both cause and expression of the web of cross-tribal network connections forged by marriage, mobility and friendship which knits Oklahoma Indian society together.

Indian doings are, almost without exception, week-end events, adjusted to the requirements of five-day work weeks. Some of them occur in isolation; others can be combined by organizers into packages such as war dance, stomp and crafts show all within the framework of a week-end pow-wow. People set up camps at the more complex events of longer duration, pow-wow or ceremonial, and what goes on in the camps, while much less spectacular than what goes on in the arena, is just as socially important.

While some doings are episodic in their timing, others schedule more regularly in time to constitute circuits of interattendance at like events much like cyclical markets. I have been mapping these circuits out of the attendance choices which people make and comparing their ranges and relative closure. Any weekend during the "pow-wow season," from Memorial Day to Labor Day, offers Indians a large number of events from which to choose. Their choices, within the constraints of time and distance, reflect three kinds of commitments which vary in their importance to people: commitment to tribe, commitment to friends and relations in other tribes, and commitment to what I call specialty. Many Indians invest their time and resources in acquiring some particular competence rather than another; they become what Indians call "real pow-wow people," "stomp dance people," "peyote people." As the circuits they follow reflect this specialization, they construct inter-tribal networks which differ sharply from those of less specialized, self-professed "all-around Indians," who strive for competence in a range of performance roles. People do not lose their tribal identity in becoming specialized, although they may subordinate it. Indeed, some of these specialties are fairly predictive by tribe and so figure in the ethnic stereotypes which people entertain: stomp dance people generally claim a Woodlands tribe while gourd dancers still concentrate among Plains and Prairie people. But there are Delaware, Shawnee and even Creek gourd dancers just as there are Ojibwa stomp dance leaders, and there are pow-wow people in every tribe.

Indian doings, then, are major forums for the presentation of ethnic identity on a number of levels. By participating in them, people remain, or become once again, social Indians. They are informed by a public morality which I discuss below as generic to "Indian way." They often celebrate the parallel or convergent histories of tribes who now sponsor similar doings. Cross-tribal specialties confer their own kind of sub-ethnic identity. Ceremonial coopera-

tion sets up a contrast between "home folks" or host tribe and "visiting tribes," the latter bound by the local ground rules of their hosts. And as we shall see, specific tribal diacritica can be mutually displayed. I turn now to a brief outline of what Indian ethnicity means in cultural terms.

Indians associate with each of the three racial categories a repertoire of behavioral expectations which they call "ways," styles of doing things. Knowledge of "White man" ways is very general, if often stereotypic, and it is these ways which govern what I earlier and perhaps misleadingly called ethnically irrelevant encounters such as work relations. Most of my informants are relatively adept at adjusting their behaviors in accordance with the demands of these situations, by comparison with what is often reported of "reservation" Indians (Bigart 1972).

The range of institutions which Indians and Whites share in this manner in northeastern Oklahoma is today very great. By Van den Berghe's definition, this means that cultural pluralism is relatively restricted as regards the formal articulation of ethnic identities. To argue this does not deny that there are very great cognitive and behavioral differences between many older, "traditionalist" Indians and Whites. The distinction is a tricky one, but I think it analytically important. It accounts for the low visibility of Indians as Indians on the social horizons of most White area residents with whom I have spoken.

Where then do "Indian ways" operate and how? I find it useful to classify these cultural representations of Indianness in the following ways: My informants consider language to be the most powerful symbol of Indian identity in its tribal varieties. It is also, in my area, the least general in use and the most difficult to maintain or to relearn. Most surviving languages in northeastern Oklahoma are no longer vernaculars but have effectively become esoteric or ritual codes, invoked in prayer contexts. More Delaware can pray than can

conduct sustained conversations, and still more Delaware know a few expressions: "mitsi" ("Let's eat") or "wanísi" ("thank you") which they use emblematically.

It is easier for Indians to abide by moral ground rules, a set of quite general prescriptions which are supposed to guide behavior in social encounters, and with reference to which people are judged as being "respectful" or "disrespectful," acting like Indians or acting like White men. There is a remarkable uniformity to these ground rules across tribal frontiers, and it is here, rather than in the dissemination of overt cultural features, that I locate the real crux of "Pan-Indian culture" (Howard, 1955; Thomas, 1968), or as they say, "doing things Indian way." For many, by no means all, persons, these norms orient everyday interaction with other Indians. But their conscious and elaborated expression is in public events and what I call below crisis observances, where they cast behavior into a moral framework which is also good ethnic theater. These ground rules are, then, public culture (Goodenough 1971) a set of standards which persons implicitly contract to follow when dealing with each other although their subjective worlds may be very different.

Some of the moral ground rules to which Indians pay at least lip service can be stated in brief: social satisfactions (making people "feel good") should count for more than technical efficiency norms in the conduct of encounters: Indian time works by a more flexible ^{and humane} clock than White man time. Deference relations should follow two rules: hosts should respect guests and juniors should respect seniors. Generosity must be displayed but is most effective when it is channeled in accordance with these rules and is accompanied by public protestations of modesty: "I don't have much but I want to do the best I can." Interpersonal transactions between peers are publically phrased in an idiom of gift and counter-gift, or mutual "helpings out," which subordinate self-interest to altruism. The delicate balance of giving and receiving,

generosity and being respected has its analogue in an equally delicate balance between under- and over-achieving, Indian way: the ideal man has his name "known among the tribes" but does not "brag on himself."

These precepts ideally structure the mobilization of persons and resources for Indian doings such as to contrast with what is claimed to be "White man way." They are underlined by the frequent use of English kin terms in distinctly Indian ways: classificatory, honorific and ritual extensions which impose a moral order of deference and mutuality on social relations. And they are mediated by the use of a common social currency--food--and more limited currencies--shawls, blankets, money--with which transactions are conducted in this moral order.

There is a great deal more variation in the technical or procedural rules for public events, stipulating what should happen in each tribe's staging of the same kind of event, tribal ways, as well as in the staging of different kinds of events by members of the same tribe. Descriptions of these rules are what most ethnographies are largely about. Their enumeration, even for Delaware, cannot be attempted here. They are significant for me in several respects: first, for the minimum "need to know" information that persons of one tribe must have in order to participate in another tribe's doings, secondly, in the possibility that cross-tribal rules may contrast in the recombination of common moves, and finally, in their uses for signalling varieties of Indian identity. In this regard, it is noteworthy that only peyote procedure, of all the rules for kinds of events, is regularly called a "way." I think this reflects a judgment that peyote way is a system of meaning as ^{well as} a system of action and thus is something more constitutive of the self, more like a tribal identity than are any of the other cross-cutting specialities or career lines which people pursue.

Life crises observances focus social attention on the ethnic identities of individuals. "Indian way" today provides two such observances as expected forums for announcing Indianness in its several varieties. They are name-givings and funerals. Just why these have survived in however modified a form where other life crisis observances have not, can best be explained by what they say about identity and how they say it. Their variants are tribal ways and peyote way. The latter has its own context: (the meeting) and its own ritual symbols, which may be substituted for tribal forms in non-meeting contexts or used to embellish them. Tribal observances, like the procedural norms earlier discussed, can be analyzed into recurrent elements and rules for their combination. Thus mortuary customs among Woodlands people in my area contrast primarily in the timing of commemorative feasts and in the relation of kin to non-kin in food transactions and in the provision of ritual services.

Because these observances derive their rationale from tribal traditions, and because the number of persons, "elders," now conversant with the past is very small, they have been politicized. Delaware dispute among themselves as to the legitimacy of forms. And because people are now so inter-married and inter-connected, these tribal markers are now neither ascriptive nor even mutually exclusive. People choose, and they may quarrel over, forms which emphasize one, or several identities for themselves and their dead. In one recent, and rancorous, funeral a woman was buried with a "White man" funeral home service, a Shawnee prayer at her graveside, in a Delaware pow-wow costume and with a peyote eagle feather in her hand.

The same general conditions operate in the display of what I call badges: diacritics which can be put on, or put up, dismantled, discarded. There are three kinds of forums in which these badges are displayed: first, ethnically open public situations, such as city streets or stores, where the signals work

broadside, easily picked up by other Indians but not always by Whites. Badges usable for these situations include things like "Indians" personal jewelry: barrettes, beltbuckles, earrings. They also include bumper stickers: ~~more~~ obvious messages like "Custer wore an arrow shirt" or "United States is Indian Country," ~~and~~ ^{and} more favored ~~and~~ satirical code messages: "Support your local 49," "Live longer, drink more sofkey" which are unintelligible to most Whites. These badges rarely communicate anything about the tribe of the displayer; they are generic "Indian" markers which utilize themes in now general use.

Secondly, there are badges presented at Indian doings. Dance regalia are not the only such badges but they are the most spectacular. Some regalia is coded for tribal identification; others are not. Men war dancers have the option of dancing "straight" or dancing "fancy" in feathers. Women may dance in generic shawl, white buckskin, or in cloth costumes which have tribal meaning. What these last signal is ideally the tribe of the dancer, but it may also be a tribe with which the dancer has established network connections such that the wearing of the costume can be legitimated upon challenge. One teenager I know, Delaware/Otoe/Sioux, wished to wear Kiowa dress. She worked through her kin network to "get permission" from the family of her mother's mother's sister's daughter's husband. People do not always do this, but if they do not, they will be talked about and may even be publically, and embarrassingly, challenged. Since there are differences in the construction, decoration and workmanship of the costumes made by particular Delaware women, these can be compared for their relative historical "authenticity." But they should also be compared with each other and with the costumes of Shawnee and Osage women to get at the minimum features which work to signal "Delaware" as opposed to Shawnee and Osage.

Finally, I distinguish those badges used in domestic display, things set up in and around the homes of Indians which represent their Indianness to

visitors. Indian and White families of comparable socio-economic status in my area differ less in the construction and furnishing of their homes than in their decoration. Blankets and cushions decorated with Indian motifs lie about on sofas. Regalia displayed at Indian doings, such as dance fans or peyote fans, are frequently hung on walls, together with photographs taken at doings or showing residents and their friends in "Indian pose," wrapped in a Pendleton blanket and holding a fan.

In the foregoing I have outlined a framework for understanding Indian ethnicity which I think makes sense of what I find people doing in northeastern Oklahoma today. It recognizes boundary processes on two levels: that of "Indian" and that of "tribe," being played out in specialized forums which can themselves promote the formation of cross-ethnic identities. I have argued that "emic" labels of "tribalness" are plotted out on an extraordinarily diverse social reality, and that their symbolic assertion is always in some measure optative. This argument is not intended to explain all the things about Indians which "acculturation" or "adjustment" models predict, either about the internal order of an Indian community or about its vertical articulation with the institutions of the national society. It does account for some things about Indians which these others do not, notably what happens in horizontal inter-ethnic relations. And it does so in ways which I think render them more real, as social actors as well as culture-bearers or culture-losers. There may well be a place for Asian models on the American prairies.

NOTES

1. Field work on which this paper is based was carried out in northeastern Oklahoma in 1973 and 1974, with support from the Wenner Gren Foundation, Bryn Mawr College, and the Phillips Fund of the American Philosophical Society.
2. "Anadarko" Delaware, now tribally quite distinct, are settled near Anadarko with the Caddo and Wichita.
3. Exceptions to this generalization are the Ponca tribal housing project at White Eagle and the three Osage "Indian villages" on small reserved tracts in Osage County. Only a minority of Osage live on these tracts, which are used primarily for the yearly Inloška (ceremonial war dance).

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